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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000386

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, DRL, S/CRS, INR/IAA
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TREASURY FOR MAUREEN WAFER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [ECON](#) [USAID](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS LES CAYES

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson. Reason: E.O. 12958 1.4
(b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador visited Les Cayes March 26. The mayor portrayed his city as calm and relatively free of drug trafficking but lacking sufficient funding from the central government. The head of MINUSTAH's regional office emphasized that political instability and drug trafficking were continuing threats, although he expected the upcoming Senate elections to be relatively calm because the pro-government Lespwa party had co-opted the most formidable candidate of Fanmi Lavalas. End Summary.

Political Picture

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador visited Les Cayes, capital of the South Department, on March 26 accompanied by the USAID Country Director and PolCouns. She first called on Mayor Yvon Chery. The mayor portrayed his city as calm now after the politically-based riots of April 2008 had passed. (Note: the April 2008 riots of food prices first broke out in Les Cayes before spreading to Port-au-Prince. End note.) He thought that reviving tourism could 'save' the South Department. Chery accused the central government of neglecting the south after the summer hurricanes of 2008, but the NGOs Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas had stepped in to help. The region had great agricultural potential, with lots of water, but farmers needed technical help if the continuing rural-to-urban migration were to be slowed. The mayor claimed that his city did not have a high crime rate, and that persons could walk the streets safely at all hours. There are no kidnappings. When the Ambassador noted there were few Haitian National Police (HNP) officers to be seen, the mayor replied that the HNP enjoyed the help of police and troops from MINUSTAH.

¶3. (SBU) Mayor Chery said that what his city lacked most was money to deliver basic municipal services. He blamed this situation on a 'dictatorship of parliamentarians' in Port-au-Prince who steered money to the capital to the detriment of the provinces. Nevertheless, his city was

building social housing to accommodate citizens who would be removed from housing located too close to the area's flood-prone ravines. The mayor echoed Ambassador's observation of good electricity service: Electricite d'Haiti (EDH) had a local dam that kept the city supplied with electricity virtually around the clock. The main local business was trade (a local cement factory had closed) but local merchants were hard pressed to pay for the transport of goods all the way from Port-au-Prince. He recalled past days when Les Cayes had its own international port, and urged that it be reopened. Chery said the campaign for the April 19 Senate elections was off to a slow start in the south.

¶4. (C) PolCouns called on the head of MINUSTAH's regional office, Amadou Ouadraogo (Burkina Faso) and his aide, Joseph Benjamin Lormilus (Haiti). They recalled that the food riots of April 2008 had broken out in several poor districts in Les Cayes, including La Savanne. They had been organized by a local grass-roots organization close to the pro-Aristide party Fanmi Lavalas called Platform des Militants du Sud (Platform of Militants of the South - PMS). At some point during the rioting, that organization decided to storm the local jail and free a number of inmates being held on drug charges, an attempt that failed.

¶5. (C) Ouadraogo and Lormilus explained that international assistance had poured into the area immediately following the August-September 2008 hurricanes. However, those feeding programs had run out early in 2009, and they feared that social discontent was beginning to rise. MINUSTAH had noted several recent appeals to join demonstrations in Les Cayes, although these had not been very large. They did not anticipate significant violence during the campaign for the April 19 partial Senate elections. The man who had expected

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to run in the South Department under the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) banner, Franky Exeus, had defected to Lespwa when Fanmi Lavalas had chosen another candidate, Jacques Matelier. Exeus had brought along a number of FL organizers to his side. Ouadraogo and Lormilus expected that Exeus would draw off many votes from FL, and that many other FL supporters would stay home on election day. MINUSTAH did not anticipate significant violence during the campaign, such as violence directed against Exeus.

¶6. (C) Ouadraogo inquired about the reasons for President Preval's and the USG's efforts to capture accused drug trafficker Guy Philippe. PolCouns explained that Preval saw Philippe as the most threatening example of a drug lord trying to buy his way into politics. The CEP had disallowed Philippe's candidacy for the April 19 Senate elections due to his drug ties. The U.S. was assisting in efforts to try to capture him, based on a U.S. warrant.

¶7. (U) The Ambassador and the USAID Country Director participated in the ceremonial opening of USAID's Market Chain Enhancement (MarChE) project. Implemented by the U.S.-based Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs (CNFA), this three-year, USD 14.9 million project aims to support the value chains in the tourism, agriculture and handicrafts sectors, including through provision of business development and finance/investment services. Minister of Tourism Patric Delatour, Les Cayes Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Pierre Dennery, and CNFA Director John Costello addressed the ceremony. In her remarks, the Ambassador emphasized how MarChE would help micro-to-medium-sized businesses improve their production and bring goods and services to market. She emphasized how other USG-financed projects had benefited Les Cayes, such as repairs to schools, clinics, roads and infrastructure after last year's hurricanes, micro-credit programs, and scholarships for needy students.

¶8. (U) The Ambassador visited the local headquarters of IOM,

which since late 2008 is implementing 19 PEPFAR projects including irrigation and drainage canals, and rehabilitation of schools. One of these is the Sainte Claire Health Clinic Laboratory, which IOM, using PEPFAR funds, expanded to house a new laboratory. Visiting the facility, the Ambassador met the clinic's staff, who see approximately 30 patients per day. Patients find this small clinic more accessible than the overcrowded central hospital in Les Cayes.

¶9. (U) The head of IOM's Les Cayes office, Brian Flannagan, also showed the Ambassador a USAID-funded IOM project to improve agriculture by rebuilding dilapidated irrigation canals. The Ambassador toured an irrigation canal built in the 1980s in L'Islet Masse, a rice-producing area just outside Les Cayes. Recently rebuilt by IOM in consultation with the Community Council of Islet Masse, the local farmers' association, the 1.6 km masonry-lined canal had a number of gates that permitted the regulation of water flow. The project generated 566 short-term jobs. To better utilize the increased rice yields, the farmers association took out loans to build a rice-drying and -milling facility, which the Ambassador toured.

¶10. (U) Finally, the Ambassador visited the ''Essential Oils'' factory, one of the world's major producers of vetiver oil, an ingredient of most perfumes. The owner, Pierre Leger, explained how his factory purchases vetiver root from thousands of local small farmers, boils the roots, and then boils the fragrant oil out of this liquid. Leger said that UN figures say that over 20,000 local farmers sell production to his factory. The factory employs only several dozen people, mostly security guards. He claimed that a farmer with one hectare of vetiver can gross USD 12,500 per year, an enormous sum by Haitian agricultural standards. Worried that Haitian production is vulnerable to political instability, Leger noted that various European perfume producers have contracted him to begin production in African countries such as Rwanda to diversify their vetiver sources.

SANDERSON